



A BRAVE NEW START

Camilla and Andy Clark enjoy every moment of their new life, perched high above Start Bay in Devon where they have built a contemporary home that fuses coastal art with flamboyant architecture

WORDS DEBBIE JEFFERY PHOTOGRAPHS RICHARD DOWNER







OPPOSITE To the rear, the house follows the cliff's contours, forming two glazed storeys designed to enjoy fabulous views through sliding glass doors. It has recently been named Local Authority Building Control Southwest regional winner for Best Individual New Home ABOVE LEFT Camilla and Andy Clark TOP LEFT & ABOVE RIGHT Built by Cedar Construction SW Ltd, the house's front façade appears low slung and unassuming, with rendered walls and comparatively small windows

After spending a winter enduring the freezing, damp dormer bungalow we'd bought as a holiday retreat in Devon, we realised that renovating the building might not be our best option,' recalls Camilla Clark of the detached cliff-top property she and husband Andy purchased in 2018. The couple had previously spent happy family holidays in Cornwall with their daughters, Mimi and Lara, now 25 and 28. 'That pull to the coast was always there,' says Andy, 'so we began looking at properties, hoping to find somewhere in Devon or Cornwall with a sea view, but never dreaming of anything as incredible as this.'


The loss of Camilla's sister to cancer had served as a catalyst for the family to rethink their hectic lifestyle, with Andy deciding to take early retirement from his globetrotting career to spend more time at home. 'We'd come with friends on a holiday to Devon one rainy January,

renting a house together in Dartmouth,' explains Camilla. 'The area wasn't familiar to us, and after walking past an estate agent's window one day we looked on their website and found the dormer bungalow. There was a stunned silence from us both when we first saw the view in real life.'

RIPE FOR RENEWAL

Perched high on a cliff in the coastal village of Stoke Fleming, three miles from Dartmouth, the plot enjoys a stunning panoramic outlook over Start Bay and beautiful stretches of coastline, leading Camilla and Andy to make an offer. Life in the 1930s building proved far from ideal, however, and the couple approached several architects for their input on how best to revamp the property. 'The holiday house in Dartmouth where we'd stayed had a lovely feel, with huge open-plan living spaces and exposed glulam beams, so I looked back through planning

applications to trace the architect,' continues Camilla, a talented artist with a degree in architecture and art, who has worked in commercial interior design. 'James Lock of Roderick James Architects was our stand-out choice, because he listened and was genuinely excited by the challenge.'

Born of a collaboration between architect and clients, the replacement house that now stands on the plot weaves together everything on the Clarks' wish list and more. A reverse-level layout places three en-suite bedrooms on the ground floor, together with a cinema room, games room, and Camilla's airy art studio. Upstairs, open-plan living space and the principal bedroom suite spill out onto a glass-fronted balcony, which curves and folds around the angled façade. 'We wanted something ultra-contemporary but weren't keen on a box-on-a-box style,' says Andy. 'Camilla actually made a scale model of 

PORTRAIT OF THE CLARKS SG HAYWOOD PHOTOGRAPHY




ABOVE Sofas from master upholsterer EcoSofa are made from FSC-certified timber and a range of natural materials with no toxic chemicals as Camilla is allergic
 OPPOSITE & ABOVE The open-plan living/dining/sitting room on the first floor enjoys 180° views from the wraparound balcony and through glass doors
 BELOW The kitchen features a striking bespoke splashback, made by local company Custom Splashbacks, from a picture of one of Camilla's coastal paintings

the house, using a torch to track the path of the sun into rooms, so that we could really understand how it might feel.'

DEVON VISTAS

The sloping site means that, from the front, the building presents as an unassuming single storey with modest windows. To the rear, however, it tumbles down the cliff to form two levels, opening onto terraces and breathtaking views of the water through walls of glass doors, sheltered by a dramatic oversailing roof canopy. This faceted design creates irregular-shaped rooms and enables 180° views of the water and beyond. Inland, the countryside is of rolling hills and winding lanes, with woodland, fields, and streams, and the village is designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Andy chose to project manage 









OPPOSITE A contemporary four poster bed stands in Mimi's ground-floor room ABOVE Instead of the grey tiles the couple had ordered, the Clarks received a consignment of sand-coloured tiles, which they chose to keep for the terrace and steps leading down to a plunge pool

the build, living in a caravan in a nearby holiday park in 2019, so that he could be on site daily. 'Camilla would travel down from our home in Somerset every weekend, and while I focused on the structural decisions, she took charge of the interior and garden design,' Andy explains.

Local contractors were employed whenever possible, with their builder living in the same village. 'We knew that our involvement would be fairly major, so we wanted to work with someone who would take our ideas on board,' Camilla says. 'Externally, the materials we chose needed to withstand the harsh coastal conditions and salt air, with local stonework and a recyclable zinc roof. I also suffer from multiple allergies, so everything inside the house was sourced

to reduce the emission of chemicals and volatile organic compounds (VOCs).'

Camilla found an ex-display kitchen, which had been standing in a showroom for a year, making it less likely to release toxic chemicals, such as formaldehyde, into the air when installed in the glass-walled kitchen/dining/living space. Paint and even handmade sofas were discovered with sound eco-credentials, and immense care has been taken to create a healthy home for the family.

AN ARTIST'S EYE

'We know how lucky we are to live in such an amazing place,' says Camilla, who often draws inspiration for her artwork from the sea and coastline. Her talent has been put to good use throughout the new house, including

the bespoke splashback in the kitchen made from an image of a vibrant abstract design, which invokes fond memories for Camilla. 'I had an idea in my head and added leaves and flowers to one of my coastal paintings, including blossom from a cherry tree that I'd planted with my sister,' she says.

Despite some horrendous weather, restricted site access, and the Covid pandemic causing unexpected delays, the challenging build was completed in 16 months and the family moved in during August 2020. 'Thanks to the collaboration and teamwork of everyone involved, it proved to be a very rewarding experience,' says Andy.

Moving to the coast has given the Clarks and their dog, Lupa, the opportunity to explore beautiful







OPPOSITE A simple concrete staircase was installed, with the walls throughout the house painted in VOC-free paint from Little Knights. The house enjoys a spectacular cliff-top setting and the superb sea views can be admired while lazing in the hot tub ABOVE The master suite is the only first-floor bedroom, and wood-effect porcelain tiles were used to clad the wall on either side of the bed, to complement the copper drum lights

local walks and spend some time out on the water. 'We're not experienced sailors but decided to buy a RIB,' says Camilla. 'One day we spotted a huge pod of about 30 dolphins swimming towards us, and within seconds they were with us, riding the bow wave. We felt so honoured that they chose to play around us for an hour.'

The couple's daughters also appreciate the new house and its setting, and Mimi is a keen diver who has encouraged Andy to join her. 'Our lives now are very much influenced by the sea,' explains Camilla. 'Unlike some coastal towns, Dartmouth doesn't shut down in winter, so there is always something to do here, but the ever-changing view from our house means that it's never a problem to just stay at home.'

CAMILLA & ANDY'S FIVE FAVOURITE LOCAL THINGS

1 Walking Start Point. 'Our favourite local walk is the loop around Start Point, where you can take a dip in the sea and try to spot seals, as well as enjoying sweeping views along the beautiful stretch of coastline.'
(visitsouthdevon.co.uk)

2 Café culture. 'Locals and tourists alike often stop for breakfast at the well-known Cafe Alf Resco in Dartmouth, a relaxed, cosy venue that dishes up plentiful portions of British lunch and breakfast food.'
(cafealfresco.co.uk)

3 Farm produce. 'We enjoy visiting Stokeley Farm Shop at Stokenham in the South Hams, which boasts a deli,

butchery, restaurant, café and plant centre, supporting local producers and growing fruit and vegetables throughout the year.'
(stokeleyfarmshop.co.uk)

4 Irresistible shopping. 'Burt and Buoy is a great independent shop in Dartmouth, owned by a graphic artist and illustrator, selling art, gifts, and nautical homewares.'
(burtandbuoy.com)

5 Looking at art. 'Spread over two floors of a 19th-century building in the heart of Dartmouth, the independent Dart Gallery hosts excellent exhibitions showcasing contemporary British artists, as well as offering a framing service.'
(dart-gallery.com)